

Executive Summary

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY (FOI) RELEASE OF FISH HEALTH AND SEA LICE DATA

APRIL 12, 2010

In compliance with a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP) decision adjudicated by the provincial Privacy Commissioner, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (MAL) has released electronic farm-by-farm database information to the applicant, T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation.

The FOIPP request originated in 2004 and the release includes electronic farm-by-farm database information of sea lice data from the Broughton salmon farms between October 2002 and August 2004, as well as all health data collected from marine salmon farms in B.C. that MAL acquired during its Fish Health and Lice Audit and Surveillance Programs over the same period. The information this data provides has been publically reported through the Ministry's 2003-2005 Annual Fish Health report.

The Ministry's raw electronic data is analyzed by qualified veterinary professionals and summarized in the Annual Fish Health Report. The Fish Health Audit and Surveillance (FHAS) component of the Ministry's Fish Health Program consists of three main tasks:

- 1) Provincial fish health bio-technicians monitor activities and review health-related records at marine salmon farms, as outlined in the farm's Fish Health Management Plan;
- 2) Provincial bio-technicians collect samples from recently dead or moribund fish to facilitate active surveillance for bacteria, viruses and parasites and to determine farm-level disease events; and,
- 3) The audit results are compared to industry reports generated through the B.C. Salmon Farming Association (BCSFA) database.

The released data is comprised of 216 salmon health audits conducted between October 2002 and August 2004, as well as collected diagnostic samples for disease analysis from 1326 fish. Expected survival rate for farmed fish reported from B.C. salmon farms ranges from 94 to 98%. All farms categorize their dead fish, giving probable explanation for the cause of death. Roughly 10% of these freshest carcasses are used as indicators of any active disease that may be present in the robust living population.

These fresh carcasses are selected and tested by MAL for cause of death and a number of specific diseases and pathogens of concern (i.e. bacteria and viruses

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recognized federally and internationally that may affect fish movement and trade). The October 2002- August 2004 specific findings for these disease agents were:

- Infectious Salmon Anemia Virus (ISAV) – none detected from 1326 fish
- Infectious Pancreatic Necrosis Virus (IPNV) - none detected from 1326 fish
- Infectious Hematopoietic Necrosis Virus (IHNV) - 27 positive detected from 1326 fish, representing the end of the 2001-2002 outbreak
- Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHSV, Pacific strain) - 11 positive from detected from 1326 fish
- *Piscirickettsia salmonis* - 9 positive from detected from 1326 fish

All disease findings from the audit of salmon farms have been previously reported in British Columbia and the bacteria and viruses found are natural common infections of wild and farmed fish in B.C. waters. For Atlantic salmon carcasses tested, 70% of audit cases found ‘no infectious disease’ (at the farm-level). Of the infectious disease found in some carcasses, the main diagnoses were bacterial kidney disease (8%) and mouth myxobacteriosis (6%). For farmed Pacific salmon carcasses tested, 66% of the audit cases found ‘no infectious disease’ (at the farm-level), and the main disease diagnoses were bacterial kidney disease (32%) and the gill parasite *Loma* (4%).

The Province established a comprehensive health management program for salmon aquaculture in 2001 and the Ministry has been verifying compliance and assessing performance of the program since October 2002. The Province’s Fish Health Program has been reviewed by independent epidemiologists on two occasions in 2006 – once by the non-profit Centre for Coastal Health, and a second time by AusVet Animal Health Services, an epidemiology consulting group. The Centre for Coastal Health stated in its evaluation: *“The data collected as part of the B.C. Fish Health Audit and Surveillance Program exceed international standards to demonstrate freedom of disease and the level of fish health monitoring in BC is more comprehensive than in other parts of Canada and other salmon producing regions of the world.”*

The provincial audit and surveillance program is recognized nationally and internationally as important and vital to trade, biosecurity and seafood sustainability. The program provides regulators and the public with a comprehensive understanding and confidence in the health status of salmon stocks raised on marine salmon farms in BC. The Ministry remains concerned with the broader consequences of releasing farm level data. Release of farm level data goes against internationally recognized best practice for audit and surveillance activities.

The Province is working with federal colleagues at Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to discuss future disease verification and surveillance management of aquaculture. For more information on the Annual Fish Health Reports, or for detailed analyses of audit data since 2003, visit http://www.al.gov.bc.ca/ahc/fish_health/index.htm.